

one of our Nation's finest, died in the crash.

Aaron Weaver was a husband, a father, a brother, and a son; but he was also a fighter. In Iraq, Aaron was fighting to protect our country's way of life while fighting for his own life as well. You see, Aaron Weaver was a cancer survivor. He was still being treated when his unit was called to duty in Iraq. Aaron had a choice to stay, but he elected to fight for the country that he loved. Aaron was on the way to have his blood tested for cancer when the Black Hawk he was riding in was shot down, killing all on board.

We know well our freedom could not have been won nor our liberty maintained without those willing to make this ultimate sacrifice. But I know these are weak words to the grieving family left behind. I pray the Lord will maintain their memory of Aaron and assuage their pain. Aaron survived the battles in Mogadishu, he fought cancer, and was engaged in a great and noble cause in Iraq. Mr. Speaker, please join me in honoring a true American hero.

Last Saturday, I attended services for Aaron. He lived in Citrus County, and his father still resides there. The whole family was there. They are a military family, a very, very devoted military family, and a very close family who all grieved the loss of Aaron. I would like to paraphrase his widow's comments. His widow is Nancy Weaver, and she made a comment that Aaron's life, the loss of his life, will not be in vain if children in America can live safely; if his children and every other child in America can live without fear of another attack like 9-11.

Mr. Speaker, Aaron Weaver truly was a modern American hero, and we are grateful for his service and the service of all the men and women who are serving our country.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MEEK of Florida addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

CALIFORNIA AND THE ECONOMY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SOLIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. SOLIS. Mr. Speaker, tonight when President Bush begins to talk about the state of the Union, I hope that he includes remarks that will address the plight of the people that I represent in my district.

On the economy, the President will probably talk about how our country is coming out of a recession, and in some parts of my district the recession has been there for 3 years. In fact, in at least two areas I represent, in East Los Angeles, the unemployment rate is still above 9 percent. In the city of

South El Monte, neighboring the community I live by, which is about 70 percent Latino, I would say the recession has not gone home. It is there. It is 9 percent.

Over 60,000 Californians in my State have exhausted their Federal unemployment benefits and another 340,000 Californians will lose those benefits in the next 4 months alone. Long-term unemployment is at a 20-year high. President Bush claimed that the \$330 billion so-called jobs through tax cuts would help create 5.5 million new jobs by the end of 2004 or 306,000 a month. The thousand jobs added to the economy in December left the Nation 305,000 short of the Bush job promise in that month alone.

Grocery workers in the State of California, 70,000, are right now on strike. They have no employment and no unemployment insurance, these families that we are talking about, not just people that have somehow disregarded their employment status. Many are women with children who are faced with having to go to food lines and go seeking other types of assistance because our State will not even provide them with unemployment insurance. The grocery strike is a part of a larger debate on health care and wages going on in this country; and these workers, and workers around the country, are fighting for fair and livable wages and for health care benefits that will allow them to ensure health care for their families.

On homeland security, at a time when we are susceptible to being attacked now more than ever, we are seeing more cutbacks in our local government enforcement of law enforcement and firefighters. In my district, people are telling me that they no longer have the support to continue to work overtime. And every time that red alert or orange alert goes on, there is a lack of money, of sufficient funds to provide for the kind of coverage that we all believe that we should have.

□ 1315

In health care, the President's Medicaid block grant proposal jeopardizes the future of the Medicaid program for millions and millions of low-income families and children. At a time when States like California are facing growing budget deficits, Medicaid reform proposals must focus on strengthening health care coverage and the safety net for our Nation's most vulnerable. Block granting Medicaid will force States to ration care by limiting the number of people who can enroll in those programs. It will reduce services and will increase the amount of money that low-income people must pay. Medicaid provides health coverage to one in six Americans, more than one-fifth of the Nation's children and their future must be the responsibility of this government.

With respect to racial and ethnic minority groups in the U.S., they continue to suffer poor health care. Their

outcomes are not good. In fact, the risk for type II diabetes among Latinos is almost twice that for non-Latinos. Eliminating these disparities requires a commitment on the part of the Federal Government to ensure that the needs of minority communities are being heard.

On education, how can schools, teachers and students be expected to meet the high standards of the No Child Left Behind Act when the President refuses to fully fund this initiative? At a time when in my home State of California, the education budget is threatened by a cut of \$2 billion, it is unfair to place this additional burden upon our children and our parents in California.

On the environment, Republicans continue to protect the wealthy corporate interests and bend over backwards to manipulate our environmental regulations to profit their allies. The health of our children and families is threatened. We should not sacrifice clean air, clean water, our most precious natural resources, and, most importantly, the health of our families.

With respect to Iraq and our veterans, the capture of Saddam Hussein was a great victory for our troops. However, we have a lot more to do. The war is not over. Our real enemy has not been captured. For example, over 500 soldiers have been killed in Iraq, with 372 of them since the President declared the end of major combat in Iraq. At this time of conflict we are reminded every day that our soldiers' sacrifices should not be taken in vain. Although we have lost a significant number of soldiers, a lot more, approximately 2,900, have been wounded in combat or disabled. Furthermore, these numbers mask the true impact of our wounded and fallen soldiers.

We need to do more. President Bush must encourage the Republican Party to keep their promise to our troops and to our country.

HEARTLAND FIRES ARE BURNING ON EVE OF PRESIDENT'S VISIT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, this evening the President will address this Congress and America. Tomorrow morning he will travel to northwest Ohio, the region in which I reside and represent. Ohio's snow-covered fields and towns this time of year give a placid impression, but they mask the fire that is burning inside the homes that dot the real Ohio that the President will not visit. It really is too bad. Air Force One will pass over most of us in northern Ohio on Wednesday morning, tomorrow.

Sealed off from the general public in a tight security bubble, the President will land at an airfield and travel by

interstate as highway patrol and sheriff's deputies close overpasses and hold people back in half-mile cordons. The President will not see them. The dutiful national press corps, with credentials issued by the White House, will be subjected to a similar fate, never meeting the folks who really live there. The motorcade will lock in its guests, ushering them to Owens College, where tuition has just been hiked by 9 percent. An invitation-only audience will await. The White House is staging photo ops and messages less than 6 weeks before Ohio's primary on March 2. But taxpayers and not the President's brimming campaign coffers are paying for Air Force One on this visit to the heartland in Ohio.

So let this message go forth. The President has the worst jobs record since the Great Depression and Herbert Hoover: 2.7 million Americans are jobless. In December, only 1,000 new net jobs were created nationwide. 300,000 Ohioans are out of work. Their unemployment benefits and health insurance are evaporating. College tuition across our State is skyrocketing. The average graduate ends up a debtor with \$17,000 in debt as they begin their careers. 1,300,000 Ohioans have lost their health insurance, nearly 80,000 more than when this President assumed office. Since 2001, another 167,000 of Ohio's manufacturing jobs have disappeared. High tech, ballyhooed to have been our salvation, has been on a precipitous decline with hardware and software jobs being outsourced to India and China.

America and Ohio are being emptied of our wealth-producing jobs. Our trade deficit is at record levels. In 2003, imports exceeded exports by \$484 billion. NAFTA has hurt us deeply. These are not just numbers. These are people. Each billion dollars in trade deficit costs us 20,000 jobs. Hoover in Canton is gone, as is Dixon Ticonderoga in Sandusky and Acuity Lighting in Vermillion which is closing; Campbell Soup in Sidney; GE in Bucyrus; Good-year Tire in Greenville; Honeywell in Elyria; International Paper in Cincinnati; Lucent Technology in Columbus; Mr. Coffee in Glenwillow; Philips Electronics in Ottawa; and now Electrolux just across the border in Michigan.

When the President visited our region on September 6, 2001, I respectfully handed him a letter on Air Force One inviting him and President Fox to travel with me to meet the thousands of workers in Ohio who were losing their jobs to NAFTA and their Mexican counterparts who are also sliding backwards. He never bothered to answer. I mentioned this to him at the White House Christmas party that year and asked him about a reply. He winked and joked, and this is a quote: "The letter must have gotten lost in the shuffle." He did not ask for another.

Is it any wonder the heartland fires are burning? The trade deficit is not mashed potatoes. Jobs lost to Mexico, China and India drag down our Nation's

economic growth by nearly a third and every year of the Bush presidency it has worsened. The President will speak in Wood County, Ohio's largest corn-producing county, and my hope is he will urge new ethanol and biodiesel production to offset rising petroleum imports from foreign countries. They equal 60 percent of what our Nation consumes, the highest ever.

As gas prices in northwest Ohio just topped \$1.65 per gallon and the per barrel cost of oil now at over \$35 per barrel, do we not want America to transition to energy independence? Since 50 cents of every farm dollar earned today is Federal subsidy, what a gigantic job-creating gift the President could give to Ohio and to America by helping launch us on energy independence.

Mr. Speaker, when the fires burn in the heartland, we know America will feel the heat.

Since 50 cents of every farm dollar earned today is federal subsidy, let's put it to work to remedy the nation's chief strategic vulnerability—reliance on imported crude, a key component of our trade deficit. Promoting bio-fuel independence would create vast numbers of new jobs here at home, far more than Mars exploration or the billions being spent for Iraq rebuilding.

Ohio is plagued by deficits due to the poor economy. Declining revenues have used the state to raise taxes—fuel taxes, sales taxes, cigarette taxes, property taxes. Whatever federal tax relief the Bush Administration might have envisioned has been eaten up by rising state taxes. Even with Mrs. Bush's Reading campaign, our local libraries suffered state cutbacks, had to close down services, and were forced to seek a local levy to sustain normal hours.

The public sector isn't the only pressure point either. Ohio bankruptcies broke a record with over 10,500 last year, and the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corp just announced a troubling \$11.2 billion deficit threatening the solvency of our nation's private retirement plans. This is serious indeed.

Each year of the Bush Presidency, his budgets have ballooned the federal deficit. 2003 goes down as the worst red ink in history!

The bipartisan Concord Coalition calls the Bush budgets the "most irresponsible" ever. Our national debt has now broken \$7 trillion, and we are adding \$2.03 billion to the debt each day. This poor management threatens the long-term solvency of Social Security and Medicare.

The International Monetary Fund has warned that these net financial obligations, heavily floated through borrowing from foreign countries, pose "significant risk for the U.S. and the world." The U.S. economy as a whole will end up paying 40 percent of its total earnings in a few years, to pay interest on this "unprecedented level of external debt for a large industrial country."

It doesn't have to be this way.

For 8 years, Congress and President Bill Clinton labored to balance annual budgets, on a track to pay down the long-term debt.

Now the President will come to Northern Ohio to talk about jobs and a \$120 million national new job training initiative. Irony since Ohio, due to abysmal Republican manage-

ment in Columbus, still has failed to obligate \$242 million in job training and transition funds for which I have voted, the second-most of any state in the nation. Ohio is under watch and being fined for poor performance in federal job training efforts. These dollars were meant to help unemployed workers gain a foothold in this economy. I hope that during his visit, this President will join me in my efforts to recapture these funds for Ohio's workers despite an inept State government. Ohio's workers could use his help.

In Ohio, we are grateful to be a battleground state in Election 2004. Ohioans seek good jobs with good wages; health and retirement benefits that can't be taken away; affordable education for youth; and prescription drugs under Medicare for seniors. We seek respect for veterans, in theatre and afterwards fiscal responsibility and energy independence.

Every citizen must ask the question in this Presidential election year: Am I, and America, better off now than we were four years ago?

When the fires burn in the heartland, we know America will feel the heat.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. NORTON addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

OREGON ISSUES AND THE PRESIDENT'S STATE OF THE UNION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. WU) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WU. Mr. Speaker, the most important thing the President can tell Oregonians tonight is what he will do to improve our struggling economy. All Oregonians hope for an improved economy that creates new and high-wage jobs. But the President must not let his hopes and expectations for future economic growth blind him to the current plight of the thousands of Oregonians who are out of work today. The unemployment rate in Oregon is a shocking 7.2 percent. But this is not a naked statistic. This is people losing their homes, losing their health care, losing their ability to send their children to college and a better future.

I was on our solid light rail system recently and I met a gentleman who came up to me and said, "Congressman, I have two master's degrees and I have been working in high technology for almost 20 years. But I've been without work for 18 months and I've lost access to unemployment benefits." To show compassion for that man, Oregonians and Americans across this country, the President must and should call for an immediate extension of unemployment benefits. For unemployed Oregonians, it is these benefits that keep their kids in college and prevent the loss of a home, a car or vital access to health care.

Too many Oregonians know the heartbreak of a jobless economic recovery. To create new, high-paying jobs,